

# APALACHEE CENTER

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER  
Ronald P. Kirkland

June 14, 2004

Parwez Alam, County Administrator  
Leon County Court House  
301 South Monroe St., Room 503  
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Dear Mr. Alam:

Apalachee Center is the only designated public receiving facility for uninsured individuals in mental health crises for DCF Sub-District 2B, which includes Leon County. Apalachee has operated its Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) at an 18-bed capacity for over a decade. Due to population growth and the reduction of beds in state facilities, the CSU has experienced dangerous overcrowding, with individuals awaiting treatment in the evaluation unit or at more costly local emergency rooms. In addition, the current CSU is only capable of serving adults and therefore, has no capacity for serving children or adolescents in need of crisis stabilization services.

The 2004 Florida Legislature approved additional funding of \$1,000,000 for expansion of the CSU. (*Tallahassee Democrat* article enclosed). This state funding will require additional local match of \$333,333.

Therefore, based upon increased match requirements and Leon County's recent utilization rates for the CSU and the detoxification unit, our annual budget request for FY 2004-2005 for Leon County's **required** match is \$591,800.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at (850) 523-3220.

Sincerely,



Virginia H. Kelly, C.P.A.  
Chief Financial Officer

Attachment

cc: Ronald P. Kirkland, CEO  
File

Tallahassee.com

Posted on Tue, Jun. 08, 2004

## Mentally ill get a bit more space

By Diane Hirth  
DEMOCRAT CAPITOL BUREAU

Since 1985, only 18 treatment beds for uninsured persons suffering a mental illness crisis have been available in Leon and seven surrounding counties.

So clogged was the system for suicidal, schizophrenic and other persons considered a danger to themselves or others that there weren't always enough beds for them to be evaluated and treated.

Some slept overnight in the waiting room of Apalachee Center, Inc., the local organization responsible for mental health services for the indigent. Others were piled into the emergency room at Tallahassee Memorial Hospital, which received the overflow.

Eight new mental-health crisis stabilization beds are on their way after July 1 as the result of a \$1 million allocation from the 2004 Legislature, Ron Kirkland, Apalachee's chief executive officer, said Monday. Some of the new \$292-a-day spots will become the first local publicly funded crisis beds for children and adolescents.

Yet as welcome as additional beds will be, more mental health services are needed, according to those in the Tallahassee area who work with the mentally ill.

The uninsured mentally ill are being recycled through jails, emergency rooms and crisis treatment centers because resources are spread so thin, they say. As mental hospitals have shrunk over the years, there has not been a sufficient surge in public funding for community-based prevention or halfway houses to care for the mentally ill.

"It's been a major crisis with the number of patients coming through this system, walking out the door and just being shuffled through the system," said Kirkland, whose agency served more than 1,000 patients in its crisis-stabilization unit last year.

Kirkland asked for 18 new beds, and is hoping to get a share of another \$6.4 million in the Florida Department of Children & Families' budget designated for crisis stabilization. DCF has yet to decide how the money will be divided, though the budget legislation says it will go to districts with the most need.

Apalachee's malpractice insurance rates, meanwhile, jumped to \$400,000 per year from \$95,000 early last year: "We're running into major lawsuits regarding discharged individuals," Kirkland said.

Tallahassee Memorial Hospital a year ago warned it might shut its 60-bed acute-care mental-health facility because of its uncompensated costs of treating so many uninsured, confirmed Carl Mahler, TMH administrator for behavioral health care. Only 47 of those beds are being used now because of a current nursing shortage, he said.

When Apalachee's crisis unit is full, "there have been eight, nine or 10 (mental health) patients waiting in the ER for a place to go," Mahler said.

Waiting to see if the new beds provide relief, Mahler said, "The promise was when state hospitals closed, resources would be transferred to the community. It's not happened as it should." He said that with more preventive care and halfway houses for the mentally ill, "crises can be prevented for most persons."

Over at the Leon County Jail on Monday, 80 of the 1,059 inmates were on psychiatric drugs.

Leon deputies often spend hours trying to find an available bed when someone is deemed by a judge, law enforcement officer or doctor to require involuntary mental-health stabilization under Florida's Baker Act.

"They're shuffled around for hours and may end up bringing them back to jail," Leon County Sheriff Larry Campbell said.

He, too, sees the closing of state mental-hospital beds - and lack of alternatives - as contributing to the homelessness and criminalization of the mentally ill - not just in Leon, but the nation as a whole.

A handful of new crisis beds are "desperately needed. But they're not going to solve the problem, or not even alleviate the problem," he said.

"It shouldn't be against the law to be crazy, but right now they're treated as a law violator because they're unable to interact with society. They end up breaking the rules, and end up in my 'hotel,'" said Campbell.

Contact Capitol Bureau reporter Diane Hirth at (850) 671-6546 or [dhirth@tallahassee.com](mailto:dhirth@tallahassee.com).

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